

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination FormSee instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Nichols. J. L., House and Studio

and or common Nichols House and Studio

105-655-60004

2. Location

street & number 820 North College Avenue

N/A not for publication

city, town Bloomington N/A vicinity of

state Indiana code 018 county Monroe code 105

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: Office

4. Owner of Property

name Carla L. and Terry L. English

street & number 820 North College Avenue

city, town Bloomington N/A vicinity of state Indiana 47401

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Monroe County Courthouse

street & number Courthouse Square

city, town Bloomington state Indiana 47401

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Indiana Historic Sites and Structures Survey has this property been determined eligible? yes ☒ nodate 1979 federal ☒ state county localdepository for survey records Indiana Department of Natural Resources
Division of Historic Preservation

city, town Indianapolis state Indiana

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one	
excellent	deteriorated	X	X	N/A
X good	ruins	unaltered	original site	
fair	unexposed	altered	moved date	

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Nichols House is a detached single-story frame cottage built in 1900 at the same time as the adjacent studio. This 5½ room house (built over a full basement) sits in the center of 1½ city lots facing College Avenue, one of Bloomington's main thoroughfares, and the two-story studio is set back to the southeast, at a slightly lower elevation.

The plan of the house, one of its most interesting features, is quasi-elliptical, with its long axis parallel to the street. The North and South ends of the house are five-sided with windows in each side. A wide front porch (or "piazza", as the architect called it) incorporating the central front door and a window to each side, accentuates the symmetry of the plan as seen from the street. Behind the three primary rooms (living room, dining room, bedroom) which make up the ellipse, is a rectangular wing containing a second bedroom, kitchen, bath, pantry and original glassed-in porch. The front-facing gable room of the front porch and a similar roof over the back of the house tie into the steeply pitched hip roof of the elliptical part of the house. The hip roof turns into conical roofs over the five-sided North and South ends.

Narrow (3" to-the-weather) clapboard siding covers the frame structure of both house and studio. Tongue-and-groove wainscoting was used for the porch ceilings and all soffits, and dentil moldings are found below the overhangs. This attention to detail is also revealed in the choice of diamond-paned sash and casement windows, decorative shingling on the porch gable, and two groups of three delicate columns with Corinthian capitals which support the porch roof. The roof, originally cedar shingles, is now brown fiberglas.

The most distinctive feature of the house is the use of geodes for the front foundation and the base of the porch. These geodes, some of which are as large as 2' in diameter, actually support the house. They are not merely facing. Geodes were also used originally to face the chimney and to delineate the driveway and gardens; some of these remain

The varnished oak front door opens into the living room, which is the center section of the "ellipse". The North and South ends ("chamber" and dining room) are accessible through 8' openings. The floors are wild cherry laid diagonally in a different direction in each room, and bordered in walnut, emphasizing the unusual shapes of the rooms. The ceilings remain their original 9' height, and the coal-burning fireplace (with oak mantel and tile surround) still has its original hearth cover.

A swinging door with leaded glass panel leads from the dining room to the pantry. The original sink and cabinets remain in the kitchen, and the bathroom retains its original footed tub and corner sink. All the doors have ornate brass hardware.

The plan of the studio is rectangular with the gable end facing the street. It has a gable roof and a small semi-conical hood at the peak on the gable end. This was clearly intended to match the similar effect of the roof over the North and South ends of the main house.

The large symmetrically arranged diamond-paned casement windows, and a built-in plaque that once read "Nichols Studio" are the main decorative features of the studio.

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Continuation sheet Nichols House and Studio

Item number 7

Page 1

The interior of the studio is simple and open in plan. A narrow staircase with railing leads to a loft where, along the South wall, the architect's storage cabinets and dry sink were placed. The walls are rough painted plaster, and the loft floor joists are exposed. The building has not heating or plumbing, but there is evidence of a wood or coal-burning stove, later removed.

The style of the house and studio could only be called "late Victorian eclectic", for it does not fit neatly into any category. The architect has incorporated decorative features of the Queen Anne style, but the symmetrical plan and prominent porch suggest an interest in the classical revival. There are a number of one-story houses built in a similar "transitional" turn-of-the-century style in Bloomington, but the unusual plan and unique use of geodes distinguish this property from all the rest.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below				
prehistoric	archeology-prehistoric	community planning	landscape architecture	religion	
1400-1499	archeology-historic	conservation	law	science	
1500-1599	agriculture	economics	literature	sculpture	
1600-1699	X architecture	education	military	social	
1700-1799	art	engineering	music	humanitarian	
1800-1899	commerce	exploration settlement	philosophy	theater	
X 1900-	communications	industry	politics government	transportation	
		invention		other (specify)	

Specific dates 1900

Builder Architect John L. Nichols

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Nichols House and Studio are significant both because the house has a distinctive quasi-elliptical plan and unique architectural features, and because both buildings were designed and built by Bloomington's first architect for his own use. They are unquestionably Nichols' most interesting design, and have been familiar and favorite local landmarks ever since construction.

John Nichols (1859-1929), a native of Bloomington who lived and worked here all his life, left quite an imprint on the appearance of the town. As the city's only architect and an active participant in community life, Nichols was commissioned to design many local buildings, including several on the Courthouse Square which are still standing. In 1908, alone, his firm supervised the construction of 632 buildings. Remaining buildings of his design include the Fraternity Building on the east side of the Square, the old First National Bank Building on the south side of the Square, and the Allen Building at 104 East Kirkwood.

A product of the Victorian era, Nichols felt comfortable with many architectural styles, all of which are illustrated in Nichols' Album of Artistic Dwellings, a catalogue of over 100 of his plans, published in 1902. In this book, which is in itself a valuable historic document, he described and illustrated the house which he had built around 1900 for himself and his first wife. In the design of his own house Nichols clearly sought to demonstrate his own ideals and architectural theories as expressed in his book. (See Exhibit A.)

In addition to the house's association with John Nichols, its significance derives from its unusual design—the plan as described in item 7—and the use of geodes for the foundation and porch. Geodes (spherical limestone rocks lined with crystals) abound in Monroe County's countryside, but their use in construction is extremely rare. In other respects the house is an excellent example of turn-of-the-century, middle class residential architecture in Indiana.

The house, where Nichols lived until 1902, was sold in 1905 to the Indianapolis Southern Railroad, which was, at that time, laying tracks just to the north of the lot. (The house which he occupied after selling this one was of little architectural interest and has been demolished.) From 1910 to 1921 the house was occupied by the general agent for the ISRR and his family. The railroad (now the Illinois Central) sold the property in 1940, and since then it has passed through many hands, slowly deteriorating. Recent owners have since restored the house to near original condition. The Studio has yet to be restored.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Creig, Hawes. Bloomington Discovered, Bloomington, Indiana, 1980.
Nichols, John. Nichols Album of Artistic Dwellings, Bloomington, Indiana, 1902.
Snider, Sheila, et. al. Bloomington Area Historic Sites & Structures Inventory.
March, 1978
Bloomington City Directory, 1900, 1902, 1906.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property Less than one acre

Quadrangle name Bloomington

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A

1	6	5	4	0	2	5	0	4	3	3	6	0	2	0
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Zone Easting Northing

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Zone Easting Northing

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Verbal boundary description and justification

Lot Number 26 and the West 60 feet of Lot 27, Kenwood Addition to the City of Bloomington, Indiana.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
N/A			

state	code	county	code
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11. Form Prepared By

name/title Dean Dodge

organization N/A

date March 1, 1984

street & number 820 North College Avenue

telephone 812/336-5462

city or town Bloomington

state Indiana 47401

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

☐ national ☐ state ☒ local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title Deputy Director, Dept. of Natural Resources

date 8-17-84

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

Nichols. J. L., House and Studio
Bloomington, Indiana
UTM Reference:
16/540250/4336020

